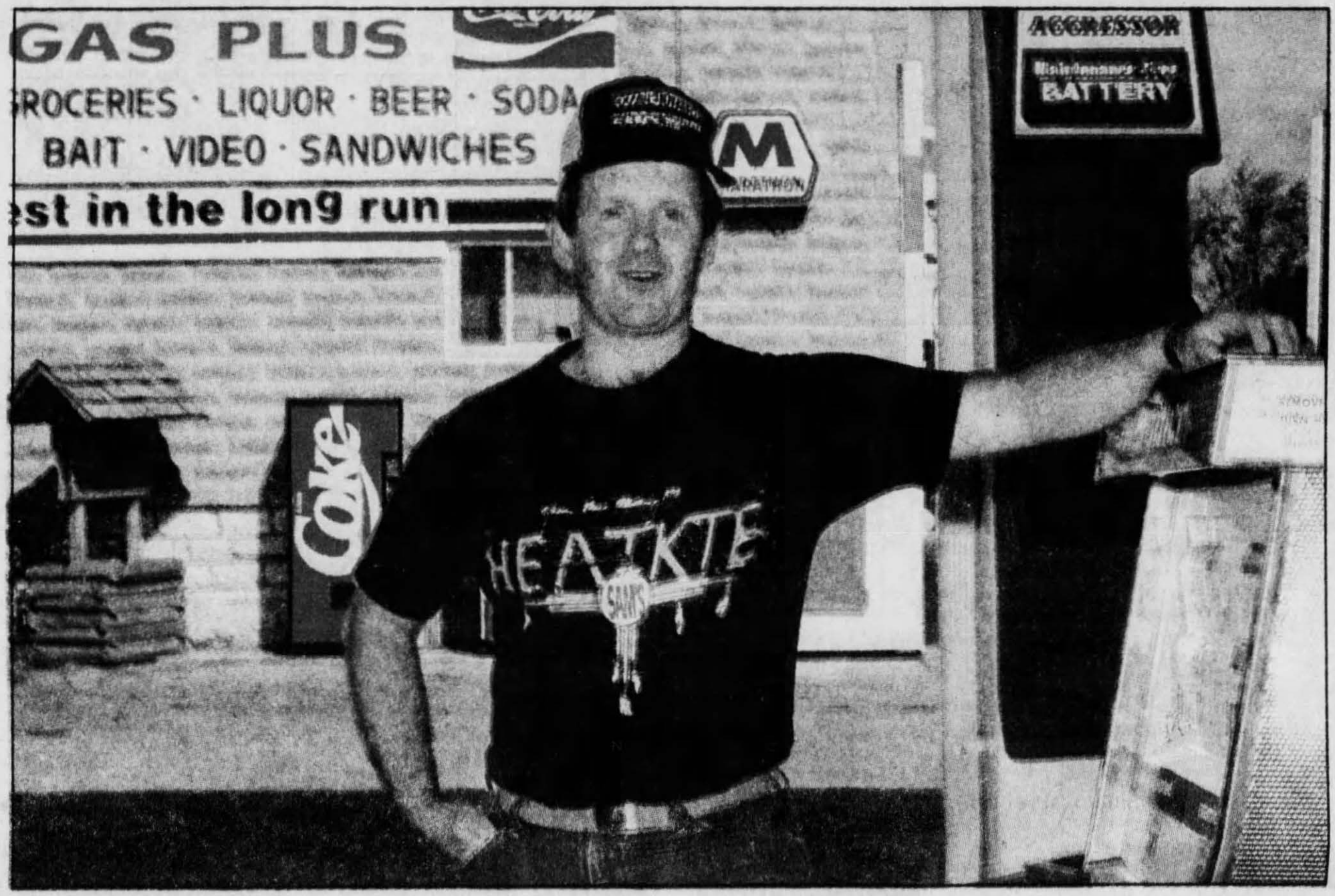
This week's community profile: Poland



Gas stop: Dave Piontek, co-owner of Little General's Gas Plus stands outside of his convenience store and gas station in Poland. The store's name comes from Piontek's nickname at a previous job.

Folks still say please, thank you

By Gary Dodge
Press-Gazette

POLAND — Hundreds of tourists stop here every summer so they can take photographs to prove they were in Poland.

But this Poland is in the Brown County town of Eaton.

The tourists seek out souvenirs from local businesses, says Dave Piontek, 36, who along with his brother Joe Piontek, 44, owns Little General's Gas Plus at Wisconsin 29 and County T. The store doesn't stock souvenirs.

Press-Gazette photos by Sandee Gerbers

"It's something we should do," Dave Piontek says. "It would be a little extra business — souvenirs from downtown Poland."

The community's name isn't the only attraction. Eddie Whipp's Hall, founded in 1922, draws attention locally.

The hall, which attracts hundreds for Friday fish fries, holds an annual rock 'n' roll dance and two polka dances a year, says Mark Whipp, 36, Eddie Whipp's son.

"At least 90 percent of business is word-of-mouth," Mark Whipp says.

The hall once was the home of SS. Cyril & Methodius Catholic Church. The original building dates back 100 years. It became a horse stable for a time after parishioners built a new church in the late 1800s. It was named Joe Whipp's saloon from 1922 to 1944.

The church has 890 members, mainly from the town of Eaton, the Rev. Dean Dombroski says.

"Church is very important here. It's one of the rallying points of the community. It has a Polish tradition where the church is important to the community," he says.

The parish has a picnic every third Sunday in July. It recently voted to hold non-alcoholic events when people under 21 are present, Dombroski says.

Poland was home to the Gray Hill Public School and SS. Cyril & Methodius Catholic School in the early 1900s. Both schools served students in grades 1 to 8, Sister Marlene Greatens says.

Gray Hill School closed in the early 1950s and both buildings were used for the Catholic School until a new school was built in 1966. It operated until 10 years ago when it closed for financial reasons, she says.

The building now is used for religious education classes and other community events, Greatens says. Most children attend the Denmark School District.

More people are moving to Poland from Green Bay, to escape "the pressures of city life," Piontek says. The growth is evident in the eight to 10 new homes built this past year.

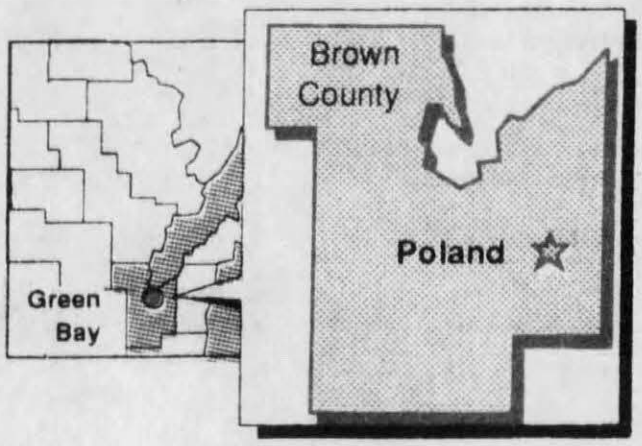
"I moved four times in my life and I never got a mile from this corner," says Piontek, referring to Wisconsin 29 and County T. "Once they're out here they really hate to go."

Therese Hanna, 3054 County T, and husband Mark Hanna, moved to Poland in the early 1980s after living in Green Bay for 1½ years.

The couple came "because of the country atmosphere. People talk to you. We were raised that way," she says. Mark is from Luxemburg and Theresa is from Tisch Mills.

"That's why we moved here. Country people still say please and thank you," Therese says.

Town of Eaton Clerk Roger Welsing sums it up this way: "Neighbors will help neighbors."



The Poland file

- **Population:** About 200.
- **Origin:** Poland celebrated its centennial in 1976.
- **Point of interest:** Home of Eaton Town Hall.
- **Location:** At Wisconsin 29 and Brown County T, 10 miles from Green Bay and seven miles from Denmark.
- **Area churches:** SS. Cyril & Methodius Catholic Church and Emmanuel Lutheran Church.

■ **Next week:** Stiles Junction in Oconto County

Wagon ho: Therese Hanna takes her children, Laura, 3, and Megan, 13 months, for a ride in Poland.

On tap: Mark Whipp checks a tap at Eddie Whipp's Hall.